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Spring 5-11-2020

## Work in the Wuhan Wilderness

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### Digital Commons Citation

Herring, Mark Y., "Work in the Wuhan Wilderness" (2020). *Winthrop Faculty and Staff Publications*. 87.  
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## Work in the Wuhan Wilderness

As with many of you, I am working from home as I compose this. My last glimmer of freedom was, aptly enough, 13 March. How unlucky, huh? As is typical for us, my wife and I attended our usual Friday night wine tasting at our favorite store in Charlotte, North Carolina, about 25 minutes from our home. We thought about not going and even discussed it. But in the end, we thought the risk wasn't too great even though we are both over the 60 threshold. Thankfully, neither of us has any underlying illnesses and so our risk is probably low. At least it has been so far.

Like many of you, our library put together a page for the Wuhan Wayfarers while our building is closed. You can find it here ([http://libguides.library.winthrop.edu/libraryservices\\_covid](http://libguides.library.winthrop.edu/libraryservices_covid)). We have been ready for a moment like this as many of our services are online anyway, and, I like to think, we are very forward-thinking. We also found ways to serve students who relied on course reserves, either by pointing to other sources, or by getting permission to post them on our e-Reserves. Everyone has chipped in and things have gone for those of in the library as well as one could expect. We also hold one-on-one research classes, virtually, of course, for students who need them. Those have also gone very well, been much appreciated, and very much attended.

Although we had thought through just about everything, working from home proffers numerous challenges. I've never been a fan of work from home, nor flextime, though as dean I have allowed both for a short time. While I did think I spent much of my time putting out fires, or in some cases, setting them as needed, I never realized just how much of my time was occupied with demoniac details that eat up a day before you know it.

Now that I am not being interrupted every fifteen minutes, I find that I can actually accomplish a good bit. Or rather, I should say that since my wife, who is retired, and our cat, Stasia, are the only two who interrupt me at all, I can get done things that need doing. The ten days of our forced internecine internment [sic], I spent delivering laptops to faculty and students. As the process snowballed, I pulled in the reserves to deliver what I could not alone keep up with. As an institution, we were not quite ready for the number of students who did not have either Internet access or devices to use to connect with classes. We have since caught up.

Meetings have not vanished as I hoped they would, but they do have newfound, even novel purposes: real conclusions. No longer do we kick the can down the road. We really have to solve problems now, in real time so to say, and so we do try to reach a solid denouement. You know it's serious when you come to understand your smallish university will lose as much as seven million dollars during this particular Chinese torture. Grandstanding philippics and didactic diatribes are no longer much tolerated or even attempted.

What I cannot get used to, however, is being stuck at home for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. I have never been much of a homebody, and when not at work, I have always been on the move: going to the mountains, seeking out new restaurants, going to the opera or symphony, theatre, movies, church, and so on. Being home all day has taken a little more getting used to than I anticipated. I have always read a lot, so reading isn't something new. What is new is how much time I have left over on the weekends to

do even more. While work is still ongoing even over the weekends, what part isn't taken up with that and not with our usual errands, is harder to fill than I thought it would be.

What the extra time has given me is time to think, and I have come to some conclusions, with which not all readers will agree. But this is a column with my name on it so I'll share them anyway.

1. Unfortunately, political grandstanding knows no end. Even though no one could have seen this coming—I mean not like this, even among those who worried about pandemics—blame is still being passed around on both sides of the aisle. It serves no useful purposes beyond scoring political points, points which will surely come home to roost at some future date. If you don't believe me, take a look at the pork (<https://bit.ly/2y6g8uo>) in the Cares Bill.
2. Maybe allowing China to make everything, including many of our pharmaceuticals, isn't such a good idea. While we do not have to cut off all trade, maybe curtailing isn't such a bad idea, but see 3.
3. China's wet markets (<https://bit.ly/2RnE5nR>) are petri dishes of unknown, untreatable, germ-infested, odious horrors. We must insist that China—and any other country allowing them—get rid of them. The last three pandemics have come from one of those markets and it's time the rest of the world helped China understand it has to do better. If we don't, those of us who remain—and it won't be many of us—will be going through all this again and again and again....
4. Modelling has its place, but it isn't the unimpeachable truth. It may help to recall that this is the same modelling that warns you of a coming blizzard only to have you wake up to 55 degrees and sunny. C. S. Lewis famously said that "Science brings to the facts the philosophy it claims to have derived from them." It simply means that all humans have biases, even scientists, and modeling preys upon some of those biases. Apparently these models have been off by 80% . If all my math classes had been curved to this 80%, I would have made straight As in math. See #1 again.
5. Online learning needs more attention than it has been getting. That probably sounds ludicrous to some, but moving every course online has taught us at this university that while we were doing this in bits and pieces, we were not fully prepared for this. If we didn't know this before, our students are telling us so now.
6. It really is true that much of the business in the world is small businesses, and we have to protect them. I doubt we'll get to do that without more pork, however (see #1).
7. Really good teachers aren't a dime a dozen. They are more like rare gems.
8. Finally, if we did not know it before, surely now we all know how important our first responders, nurses, physicians, scientists, and healthcare professionals are. Let's try not forget that as we move from isolation to eftsoon camaraderie. Li Wenliang should be memorialized with his own day. Had he not spoken at all, many fewer of us would still be here.